

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 406 473

UD 031 629

AUTHOR Bast, Joseph L.; And Others
TITLE Vouchers and Educational Freedom: A Debate. Policy Analysis No. 269.
INSTITUTION Cato Inst., Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 12 Mar 97
NOTE 49p.
AVAILABLE FROM Cato Institute, 1000 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007 (\$6; \$3 each for five or more copies).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Change; Educational Policy; *Educational Vouchers; Elementary Secondary Education; *Financial Support; Government Role; Inner City; *Private Schools; Public Schools; *School Choice; School Restructuring; *Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS *Reform Efforts; State Role

ABSTRACT

Advocates of educational freedom disagree about whether school vouchers would liberate schools and families and lead to greater freedom of choice or trap private schools in a web of subsidy and regulation that would destroy their independence and quality. In this exchange of opinions, Joseph L. Bast and David Harmer argue that voucher plans would eventually lead to the complete separation of school and state, which would liberate education from bureaucrats and politicians. They argue that vouchers would not subject private schools to excessive regulation and that no greater reform is politically feasible. Finally, they charge, libertarian opponents of vouchers ignore the plight of children in inner-city schools. Douglas Dewy counters that vouchers would not substantially reduce the state's role in education. Indeed, vouchers would create a vast system of government contractors and parents with "school stamps," a massive lobby for ever-increasing subsidies. He warns that government money always come with strings attached. (Author)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

Policy Analysis

No. 269

March 12, 1997

Routing

ED 406 473

VOUCHERS AND EDUCATIONAL FREEDOM *A Debate*

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

JOSEPH L. BAST AND DAVID HARMER

VERSUS

DOUGLAS DEWEY

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

G. F. Taylor
Cato Institute

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Executive Summary

Advocates of educational freedom disagree about whether school vouchers would liberate schools and families and lead to greater freedom of choice or trap private schools in a web of subsidy and regulation that would destroy their independence and quality. The two sides square off in this study.

Bast and Harmer argue that voucher plans would eventually lead to the complete separation of school and state, which would liberate education from bureaucrats and politicians. They argue that vouchers would not subject private schools to excessive regulation and that no greater reform is politically feasible. Finally, they charge, libertarian opponents of vouchers ignore the plight of children in inner-city schools.

Dewey counters that vouchers would not substantially reduce the state's role in education. Indeed, vouchers would create a vast system of government contractors and parents with "school stamps," a massive lobby for ever-increasing subsidies. He warns that government money always comes with strings attached.

Joseph L. Bast is president of the Heartland Institute, a nonprofit research organization based in Palatine, Illinois. He is the coauthor of two books on school reform, *We Can Rescue Our Children* (1988) and *Rebuilding America's Schools* (1991).

David Harmer is the author of *School Choice* (Cato Institute, 1994), a former research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, and one of the architects of California's 1993 educational choice initiative effort. He resides in Utah.

Douglas Dewey is president of the National Scholarship Center in Washington.

UD 031 629

Introduction

Education is the process by which we instill knowledge of our culture and our moral values in our children. That effort ought to be carried on in the voluntary sector of society. Values are not well imparted by an institution based on coercion, and the differences in values in our pluralistic society mean that government-run schools tend to leave them out of the curriculum in order to avoid political conflicts. For the same reasons that we separate church and state, we should seek to separate school and state.

Another reason to prefer provision of education by civil society to provision by the state is that decentralization and competition tend to produce better results than monopoly. We would expect higher quality education to be produced through the competitive market process. We would also expect more parental involvement in education if parents were responsible for choosing and paying for the education of their children.

Many advocates of educational freedom have suggested school vouchers as at least an interim measure on the way to full educational freedom. (Many supporters of vouchers, of course, see the voucher plan as an ideal educational system and would not advocate moving beyond it to full educational freedom.) Other educational libertarians argue that vouchers would come with regulations that would destroy the private schools and that they would lure even more parents into being recipients of "education welfare."

We at the Cato Institute believe this debate is vitally important. If our goal is high-quality education that reflects the moral values of families, and we believe that that goal can best be achieved outside the realm of the coercive state, we should carefully consider whether vouchers or any other education reform would move public policy in that direction.

In this Policy Analysis, advocates of both those positions square off. Joseph L. Bast and David Harmer argue that vouchers will not only immediately improve education for millions of children; they will also eventually lead to full educational freedom. Douglas Dewey counters that vouchers will expand educational dependency and undermine the quality and independence of private schools. We are pleased to present this contribution to the debate on educational freedom.

--David Boaz

**The Libertarian Case for
Vouchers and Some
Observations on the
Anti-Voucher Separationists**

**by Joseph L. Bast and
David Harmer**

The most distinctive feature of elementary and secondary schooling in the United States is that nearly 90 percent of school-aged children attend schools that are owned by the government, staffed by government employees, and overseen by elected or non-elected government officials. The private sector is relied upon to provide food, clothing, shelter, and nearly every other essential good and service that the typical American could want or need--but not schooling.

In 1955 Nobel Prize winner Milton Friedman proposed ending the socialist model of schooling by giving parents tax-financed certificates, or "vouchers," to pay tuition at the schools, public or private, to which they chose to send their children.¹ Three years later Virgil C. Blum, a Catholic priest and academic, published an influential book endorsing vouchers and tax credits.² Blum's call for an end to socialism in education on libertarian grounds was uncompromising:

Continued on page 4

**Separating School and
State:
A Prudential Analysis of
Tax-Funded Vouchers**

by Douglas D. Dewey

I should confess that I was slow to understand the devitalizing nature of government schooling. I spent a year and a half working at the U.S. Department of Education under Secretary Lamar Alexander, and my experience there was the springboard to my present opinions. My disavowal of vouchers was painful if not slightly protracted and, in the end, came down to a question of prudence. Too much history and common sense are stacked against vouchers' ever living up to their promise, and too much is at stake to run the risk.

Tax-funded vouchers will not eliminate or substantially reduce the state's role in education. This critique is especially directed, therefore, to those who are generally sympathetic to separating school and state, not to those who wish to maintain a state role in education.

The Voucher Elixir

In a 1955 essay, Milton Friedman first proposed the

Continued on page 29

Bast and Harmer, continued from page 3

Government control over the processes of education is infinitely more objectionable than government control of businesses which supply the physical needs of life. If forced to choose between two so great evils as government control, on the one hand, of the kind and quality of food one must eat, and, on the other hand, of the kind and quality of thoughts one must think, surely no American with a sense of the importance of freedom of thought would hesitate in making his choice. Freedom can survive, to a considerable degree, even if government tells the citizen what brand of food he must eat and what fashion of clothes he must wear. But freedom cannot long survive when government tells him what thoughts he must think.³

Today, some 40 years after the birth of the idea, the national movement for vouchers appears to be closer than ever to political success. Despite fierce and well-financed opposition from teachers' unions and other advocates of government schooling, pilot voucher programs operate in Milwaukee and Cleveland; parents in Vermont are suing to expand a hundred-year-old choice program in that state; and voucher legislation has come close to being enacted in nearly a dozen states. Supporters of school choice--including the authors of this essay--predict a major breakthrough in one or more states before the turn of the century.

As school choice approaches its hard-won moment of political success, its proponents have been surprised to meet opposition from members of the very groups that gave birth to the idea: conservatives and libertarians. At what could be a crucial moment in the school choice effort, persons once thought to be natural allies of the movement have instead become its vocal critics, even to the point of publicly campaigning against school choice referenda and legislation.

Conservative and libertarian critics of school choice support the goal of completely separating school and state. They question whether vouchers are a bridge to that goal or a dangerous experiment with "market socialism" that could lead to greater government control over private schools. They call for simultaneously ending public funding and provision of schooling.

In the essay that follows, the authors address the concerns of the anti-voucher separationists. We show that supporting vouchers is consistent with the goal of ending government funding of schooling, even though not all proponents of vouchers embrace that goal. We expose assumptions made by critics of vouchers that are at odds with their professed libertarian and conservative principles. And we describe the urgent need for immediate action to offer alternatives to the millions of children now trapped in dysfunctional government schools, a need that cannot be met by wishful thinking or simply waiting for the current system to collapse on its own.

The Goal: Complete Separation of School and State

The authors are 100 percent committed to getting government out of the business of educating our children. We heartily concur with John Stuart Mill's observation:

A general state education is a mere contrivance for molding people to be exactly like one another; and as the mold in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government . . . it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body.⁴

We understand the debilitating effects of depending on government to do things better left to the initiative of individuals. Back in 1892, in The Man versus the State, Herbert Spencer said it well:

The more numerous public instrumentalities become, the more is there generated in citizens the notion that everything is to be done for them, and nothing by them. Each generation is made less familiar with the attainment of desired ends by individual actions or private combinations, and more familiar with the attainment of them by government agencies; until, eventually, governmental agencies come to be thought of as the only available agencies.⁵

Spencer also understood how government entitlement programs, once launched, have a tendency to grow by leaps and bounds:

Legislators who in 1833 voted 30,000 pounds a year to aid in building school-houses, never supposed

that the step they then took would lead to forced contributions, local and general, now amounting to 6 million pounds; they did not intend to establish the principle that A should be made responsible for educating B's offspring; they did not dream of a compulsion which would deprive poor widows of the help of their elder children.⁶

Government involvement in education is especially insidious, as Blum and others have pointed out, because it gives government the ability to manipulate the thoughts of the very citizens who are supposed to control it. Government education demoralizes families by removing one of their most fundamental tasks. And it sets in motion an entitlement mentality that grows until it either bankrupts the nation or finally arouses the public from its stupor long enough to stand up and say "enough!"

If all that were not enough, Friedrich Hayek touched on another reason to oppose government involvement in education in the last chapter of The Constitution of Liberty:

Nowhere is freedom more important than where our ignorance is greatest--at the boundaries of knowledge, in other words, where nobody can predict what lies a step ahead.⁷

When we put government in charge of education, we allow bureaucrats and politicians to determine what is taught and how it is taught. That inevitably inhibits the discovery of knowledge and politicizes its dissemination. The threat to learning--and to liberty--is obvious.

Not all proponents of vouchers feel that way about the proper role of government in education. That should not be construed as evidence that vouchers, once in place, would not advance the goal of educational freedom. As Lord Acton wrote,

At all times sincere friends of freedom have been rare, and its triumphs have been due to minorities, that have prevailed by associating themselves with auxiliaries whose objects often differed from their own.⁸

Some of the most prominent advocates of vouchers claim that their adoption will strengthen, rather than weaken, government schools. The argument is that increased competition will compel government schools to become more efficient and effective in order to stay in business. And some advo-

cates of vouchers do not seem to care if vouchers come with regulations and restrictions attached.

It is safe to say that even advocates of vouchers who are not committed to the complete separation of school and state believe vouchers would lead to a major contraction of government-run schooling. They rarely say so in public because claims by defenders of the status quo that "vouchers would destroy the public schools" still move the public to oppose reform and change. So supporters of vouchers avoid saying that.

But when the microphone is turned off, most proponents of vouchers would say that, under a voucher system, many government schools would go out of business; some would shape up sufficiently to survive; and, beyond that, it is pointless to try to predict how markets will behave. And, indeed, how much more than that could be said about any initiative to privatize schooling? Unless we want to forbid communities to decide, by referenda or vote of local taxing authorities, that they will publicly fund a school, we cannot predict that any privatization plan or scenario will completely eradicate government education.

Separate from the question of what would happen is that of what should be the role of government in education. During the 1980s people such as former secretary of education William Bennett and Hudson Institute scholar Chester Finn believed that vouchers could improve the efficiency of schooling as well as make possible the implementation of national standards for student achievement. That call for decentralization of production and centralization of standards was smart politics during the 1980s, when a majority of the public genuinely doubted that markets could provide quality schools.

More recently, the controversy over Goals 2000 and the increasingly conservative bent of the general public have shown that national standards are unacceptable to the American people. As a result, some high-profile advocates of vouchers have withdrawn their support for national standards. For example, in 1995 Finn and Diane Ravitch of the Brookings Institution called for "clear and high standards for performance," but they went on to write, "These standards need not be national, they need not be highly detailed, they should not prescribe pedagogy or resource use, and they need not cover the entire curriculum."⁹

Whether or not what is left still amounts to "national standards" probably depends on where the reader sits. In

any case, we can count on a growing number of proponents of vouchers to embrace our view of vouchers as a vehicle for achieving total separation of school and state, not as a vehicle for imposing national standards.¹⁰

Vouchers Are the Way to Separate School and State

Like most other conservatives and libertarians, we see vouchers as a major step toward the complete privatization of schooling. In fact, after careful study, we have come to the conclusion that they are the only way to dismantle the current socialist regime.

Vouchers are a bona fide means of privatizing a public service. Vouchers are being used to get the government out of the business of building and owning public housing, operating job-training programs and day-care centers, collecting garbage, and running hospitals and clinics. Privatization guru E. S. Savas defines vouchers as "subsidizing the consumer and permitting him to exercise relatively free choice in the marketplace."¹¹ According to Savas, vouchers are the most radical form of privatization short of outright service shedding.

Is Government Control Inevitable?

The biggest concern expressed by anti-voucher conservatives and libertarians is that government controls will inevitably follow public funding of private schools, resulting in the loss of their independence, quality, and efficiency. But that risk was well understood by even the earliest proponents of vouchers. Blum discussed it at length in his 1958 book, Freedom of Choice in Education, and found the risk to be small.¹² "The doctrine that government control invariably follows the public dollar is not a valid objection to the certificate plan," he wrote. "This doctrine has been rejected in all our social security programs, in all our educational programs for veterans, and, recently, in our educational program for war orphans. And since freedom of the mind must be preserved, it must be rejected in future legislation in the field of education."¹³

Fear of greater government control of private schools is misplaced, first, because state governments may already regulate private schools at will. In the name of public safety or the general good, state governments can and often do mandate curricula, hours of study, qualifications of teachers, facilities, student evaluation, and other intimate

details of private schooling. What prevents excessive regulation is not the absence of a "cash nexus" between private schools and the state but the strength of opposition to such regulation.

Enactment of voucher legislation requires that the advocates of deregulated schooling be stronger or better organized than the advocates of regulated schooling. Why assume that a force sufficiently strong to enact such legislation would be too weak to defend it, later, against teachers' unions and other advocates of regulation? Just the opposite is more plausible: the greatest test of advocates of choice will be to enact the legislation. Thereafter, the advocates of regulation would lose their positions of influence and power and become less and less a threat to the independence of participating schools.

Second, there are many precedents of government control not following government money when that money subsidizes demand rather than supply. Millions of Americans receive government aid through Social Security, welfare, college tuition grants and loans, and other entitlement programs. They use that money to buy goods and services from a wide range of institutions, including for-profit, nonprofit, and religious institutions. Have those institutions come under the control of government because they accept that money? There is little evidence that they have.¹⁴ Blum, writing about Social Security beneficiaries, expressed it like this:

The individual needy aged may take his government subsidy and shop with complete freedom. The subsidy is not conditioned on the surrender of the freedom to purchase the physical needs of life wherever he prefers. Furthermore, the aged person may purchase whatever he desires. If for reasons of religious belief he does not wish to eat pork, it is not forced upon him by an intolerant government operating a government meat shop. The individual may purchase kosher meat, or he may purchase fish, or he may choose to dine exclusively on a vegetable diet; this is a personal matter and the government will not attempt to control his diet.¹⁵

Proposals for school choice are invariably designed to ensure that the voucher is legally regarded as a grant to the individual child or his or her guardians, not aid to the school. The U.S. Supreme Court, in Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971), ruled that the distinction between subsidizing students and schools (or demand and supply) is one of three

necessary components of constitutional school choice programs.¹⁶ The other two components are that the program serve a secular purpose and that it not involve the state in "an excessive entanglement with religion." In other words, school choice plans must be designed to protect the independence of private schools in order to pass the test of constitutionality.

Third, choice proposals have included language that would expand the legal protection private schools now have against excessive regulation--or, more often, create such protection in the first place. California's Proposition 174, for example, would have provided constitutional safeguards protecting the independence of private schools--and those safeguards would have applied to all private schools, whether they chose to accept vouchers or not. Because the anti-voucher separationists routinely ignore that point, we quote at length from Proposition 174:

Private schools, regardless of size, shall be accorded maximum flexibility to educate their students and shall be free from unnecessary, burdensome, or onerous regulation. No regulation of private schools, scholarship-redeeming [i.e., voucher-accepting] or not, beyond that required by this Section [i.e., Proposition 174 itself] and that which [already] applied to private schools on October 1, 1991, shall be issued or enacted, unless approved by a three-fourths vote of the Legislature or, alternatively, as to any regulation pertaining to health, safety, or land use imposed by any county, city, district, or other subdivision of the State, a two-thirds vote of the government body issuing or enacting the regulation and a majority vote of qualified electors within the affected jurisdiction.

Those are extraordinarily high hurdles. Imposing new regulation at the state level requires a three-fourths supermajority in the state legislature. A three-fourths vote is almost impossible to attain on any disputed issue; overriding a gubernatorial veto takes only a two-thirds vote. And imposing new regulations at any substate level requires not only a two-thirds vote of the governing body but ratification by a majority of those eligible to vote in the affected jurisdiction--not just those voting, but those registered. Given typical voter turnouts, imposing new regulation would require the nearly unanimous approval of those actually voting. All this, as against a status quo in which new regulation may be imposed by simple majorities in

the state legislature or local governments--or by dictate from the bureaucracy.

In any legal proceeding challenging such a regulation as inconsistent with this Section, the government body issuing or enacting it shall have the burden of establishing that the regulation: (A) is essential to assure the health, safety, or education of students, or, as to any land use regulation, that the governmental body has a compelling interest in issuing or enacting it; (B) does not unduly burden or impede private schools or the parents of students therein; and (C) will not harass, injure, or suppress private schools.¹⁷

In other words, not only did Proposition 174 make the imposition of any new regulation exceptionally difficult, it placed on the state the legal burden of proving that any such regulation was necessary and did not impose an undue burden on private schools, whether participating in the choice program or not.

Other proposals now being debated around the country contain provisions similar to those of Proposition 174. Whether those constitutional and statutory barriers to regulation are sufficient to keep government bureaucrats from expanding their authority over private schools cannot be deduced from a dogmatic assertion that "government control invariably follows public funds." It depends on the language of the initiative or statute enacting the choice program. Obviously, as with any effort to shape public policy, prudent drafting is required before enactment, and vigilant oversight is required thereafter. But the bottom line is this: well-drafted choice proposals make it tougher, not easier, for government to impose new regulation on private schools. A properly designed voucher program will strengthen, not co-opt or weaken, private-sector education.

The Case for Vouchers

Libertarians have been advocating an end to government education since the turn of the century, but with little apparent effect. The anti-voucher separationists seem determined to couple the same arguments and appeals that did not work for a previous generation with a newfound hostility to vouchers--the only feasible means of approaching their ostensible aim! Instead, they should consider the compelling case for vouchers.

First, education theory supports the notion that parental choice is a key factor in determining parental involvement in a student's education, and parental involvement is powerfully linked with student achievement. That makes vouchers popular even among liberal educators such as Mary Anne Raywid of Hofstra University.

Second, economic theory supports the notion that vouchers would deliver higher quality services, more customer satisfaction, and lower prices. Support for vouchers is widespread among economists, including at least five recent Nobel laureates. People who understand even rudimentary economics tend to support vouchers because of their promised efficiency gains--witness politicians such as Milwaukee mayor John Norquist and Chicago mayor Richard Daley, both Democrats.

Third, political theory supports the notion that services the performance of which is often highly subjective and interpersonal are poor candidates for political oversight and management. In those areas, bureaucracies and regulations engage in a fruitless attempt to achieve accountability. Hence, authors John Chubb and Terry Moe support vouchers.

Fourth, public opinion polls reveal that substantial majorities support a parent's right to choose; most parents would choose a private school over a government school if they could afford to; and most parents believe government schools are doing a poor job with the resources they are given.¹⁸ A voucher plan capitalizes on the public's view of the situation, even though it leaves the entitlement--which is still popular--in place. Opinion polls show that significant majorities of the public support vouchers.¹⁹

The case for vouchers is so robust and academically respectable that a broad-based coalition has been assembled for their enactment. Newspapers that would never support separation, including the Chicago Tribune and the Washington Post, nevertheless editorialize in favor of vouchers. In the academic debate, there is no doubt that advocates of vouchers have beaten the proponents of monopoly: it is only the strength of teachers' unions and other vested interests that keeps the intellectual victory from being translated into public policy victories.

A significant popular majority supports school choice through vouchers. A much larger majority supports continued public funding of K-12 education. Compare the broad appeal and support for vouchers with the very narrow appeal of the

separationist cause, and a strategic opportunity clearly emerges: separationists should ride the voucher train to get government out of the business of operating schools, an objective that brings us halfway to our ultimate goal of complete separation.

How Vouchers Lead to Complete Separation

How does an institution as cumbersome, expensive, and ineffective as the government schools perpetuate itself? Actually, we have a pretty good understanding of that. Public-choice theory tells us that a small interest group with much at stake can outmaneuver the general public that perceives only an indirect or hard-to-measure benefit. Add to that the fact that the general public itself has largely been (mis)educated by the very schools that now petition for more resources, and you have a recipe for bureaucracy, monopoly, and mediocrity that will span generations.

Because we know how the government schools perpetuate themselves, we can design a plan to dismantle them. The general public may be programmed to like government schools, and even to believe that spending more money on them will make them better. But the public is not necessarily opposed to reforms that promise to make the schools more effective, less costly, or both. And thanks to the pervasiveness of choice in the private sector, the public puts a high value on being free to choose.

Vouchers zero in on the government school monopoly's most vulnerable point: the distinction between government financing and government delivery of service. People who accept the notion that schooling is an entitlement will nevertheless vote to allow private schools to compete with one another for public funds. That fact gives us the tool we need to undercut the organizing ability of teachers' unions, and hence their power as a special-interest group.

Anti-choice separationists criticize charter schools and private management of government schools as weak forms of privatization that do not move us very far toward complete separation of schools and the state. Vouchers would take us further and faster. Once in place, vouchers make complete separation more likely. They do so in three ways.

First, on the demand side, vouchers empower parents to select schools, government or private, for their children. By doing so, vouchers destroy the three myths now preventing further privatization: (1) parents are too stupid to intel-

ligently choose the schools their children attend; (2) private schools cannot be held accountable to the parents or taxpayers and therefore cannot be trusted to offer curricula that are in the public interest; and (3) private schools are the preserve of the privileged and the wealthy, while government schools represent mainstream American values and culture.

Second, on the supply side, vouchers weaken the influence of the most powerful sources of opposition to privatization: teachers' unions and government school administrators. Those groups spend hundreds of millions of dollars each year opposing privatization efforts and undermining efforts to increase parental involvement and accountability. By weakening the opposition, vouchers clear a path to further privatization. Indeed, without a plan to systematically undercut the power of those special-interest groups, efforts to achieve total separation are futile.²⁰

Third, also on the supply side, vouchers will create a thriving marketplace for new private schools, something that simply does not exist in America today. Today's "private" sector is small, predominantly religiously affiliated, and nonprofit. Lacking real owners and investors, it can raise only a weak voice for privatization and competition. The political balance will shift away from the unions and government school defenders only when a competing special-interest group of education entrepreneurs and investors enters the debate.²¹ By allowing the creation of a market, vouchers pave the way for further privatization and deregulation.

Early voucher bills may move us only slowly toward separation. They may include provisions that temporarily prolong the power of unions, school boards, and other remnants of the socialist regime (that is the effect, if not the intent, of charter school legislation); limit the number of students who can participate; set voucher amounts too low; and place restrictions on qualifying schools. But once established, those programs will be broadened, and new (often for-profit) schools will arrive on the scene, helping to revolutionize the way schooling takes place.

A Future History of Vouchers

We can sketch a future history of education if voucher plans similar to those now being proposed are adopted. It seems safe to assume that public support for vouchers will continue to grow and legislative victories will occur with

increasing frequency. The natural progression is as follows.

Vouchers begin as pilot programs to help the poor in major cities, such as the Milwaukee and Cleveland programs and the proposals for Chicago, Washington, D.C., and other major cities. Such programs avoid charges of elitism, give elected officials the opportunity to vote to reform "somebody else's" schools, and comport with the natural desire of elected officials and managers to conduct small-scale experiments before launching radical statewide restructurings.

Once vouchers are shown to be effective even in the harsh circumstances of the inner city, middle- and upper-income families will press their elected officials for the same freedom to choose their children's schools.²² A growing number of private school entrepreneurs and their investors will lobby to expand the program while simultaneously campaigning against the anti-competitive laws and policies that protect the government school cartel. School choice will spread to middle- and upper-income communities, and soon there will be statewide programs.

In an attempt to remain competitive, government schools will allow interdistrict school choice and shift responsibility down to local schools (as the Milwaukee public schools have done in response to the pilot voucher program operating in Wisconsin). But the growing for-profit private school industry will not allow legislators to settle for government-school-only choice. Even when choice is limited to government schools, it will help build public support for private school choice by demonstrating the demand for a variety of alternatives and the ability of parents to make informed choices among them.

Government schools will diminish in enrollment and thus in number as parents shift their loyalty and vouchers to superior-performing private schools. A few government schools, perhaps high-spending suburban schools with attractive campuses and inner-city magnet schools with good academic reputations, will be able to successfully compete for vouchers against private schools. But many will be forced to close because of high labor costs, obsolete facilities, and a cumbersome management system imposed by state and local bureaucracies.

With fewer government schools to manage, large numbers of government school superintendents and administrators will have to move on to productive employment. Teachers' unions will lose members because the new private schools will be

smaller, more efficiently managed, and therefore more difficult to organize. As the unions lose members, so too will they lose political power, ending their ability to veto substantive reforms and further privatization measures.

Local school boards, where they continue to exist, may be reinvented to reflect the interests of taxpayers and consumers of education rather than government school employees. They would be separated from the legal entities that managed whatever government schools still operated in the community. Their new role would be to determine the amount of the vouchers, issue the vouchers to participating parents, and perhaps oversee the distribution of test scores and other performance-based consumer information. Such school boards would enable local taxpayers to decide how heavily to rely on taxes to support the education of their community's school-aged children.

Tax support for education will decline over time as the powerful interest groups that today prop up spending on education lose the resources necessary to slow or stop the trend toward greater efficiency; demographic and other trends are also reducing public support for schooling.²³ As the value of vouchers falls, private schools will be more successful than their government counterparts at coping with the demand for greater efficiency. Faced with falling enrollments and underutilized facilities, many government schools will lease or sell space to private schools, becoming "incubators" for or (less glamorously) landlords to the new generation of private schools.

While government spending on education will decline, overall spending on education may increase. One reason is that additional spending by the newly efficient and competitive schools will buy better academic results. The fact that such is not the case with today's wasteful government schools may be discouraging voters from supporting optimum spending levels in some communities.²⁴ Another reason is that the lower taxes made possible by the greater efficiency of schools will enable people to keep a larger fraction of their income, making it available to spend on services that they value, such as education. Like the many public school parents who today supplement their children's "free" tax-funded public education with school activity fees, tutoring at the Sylvan Learning Center, and instructional games like Hooked on Phonics, upper-income parents will increasingly supplement vouchers with their own dollars.

Further pressures to reduce spending, innovations that make education faster and less expensive, and the continued

rise in the standard of living will probably lead to enactment of means tests to determine eligibility for school vouchers, just as proposals are now being heard to means test Medicare and Social Security benefits. Most other welfare benefits by that time will also have been voucherized: food already is; housing is in the process of being; a national debate is under way over whether states should be allowed to voucherize Medicaid.

Finally, if libertarian advocates are successful and the entire welfare system is replaced with voluntary charity, means-tested education vouchers will end with the government welfare system.

Summary

Vouchers are a bona fide form of privatization that is more radical than contracting out or any other privatization option short of complete load shedding. By getting government out of the business of producing, but not funding, education, vouchers bring us a considerable distance toward our goal of a complete separation of school and state. The argument for vouchers is robust, has plainly beaten arguments for monopoly, and enjoys widespread popular support. A voucher program touches off a series of structural changes to the education marketplace that, combined with emerging demographic trends, would spell the end of government's role in education.

False Assumptions of the Anti-Voucher Separationists

Why, if vouchers are such a promising route to the complete separation of school and state, do some advocates of separation nevertheless oppose vouchers? Most of those people are driven by a reasonable fear that government control will follow public funding to schools that are now private. It has been our experience that those people become supporters of vouchers when adequate protection of private school autonomy is incorporated into legislation, and when the difference between subsidizing demand and subsidizing supply is made clear. Still, not all are persuaded. Four false assumptions appear to be to blame.

They Think Letting People Keep Their Own Money Is the Same As a Subsidy or New Entitlement

Currently, a parent who chooses a private school for his or her child is forced to pay twice for education: once for tuition at the private school and again through taxes for the government school that was not selected. Most of the parents who choose private schools do so out of religious conviction: they oppose the secular humanism taught in government schools and want their children to learn their values and religious beliefs. It is a well-established legal principle that no one should be required to pay a tax penalty to exercise a constitutionally guaranteed right.²⁵ Simple justice demands that the double payment for education be brought to an end.

Libertarians argue for ending all taxation for schooling on the grounds that taxation (at least for purposes other than the protection of life, liberty, and property), being coercive, is no different from theft. But it is consistent with that position to say that we would be most successful if we called for the removal of the least fair burden first. Vouchers do that by allowing a parent, who is already entitled to education services at the taxpayers' expense, to apply those dollars toward tuition at a private school. That entitlement, by the way, is an element of most state constitutions, not a mere matter of statutory law.

Since the point seems so often missed by the anti-voucher separationists, we will restate it clearly: vouchers do not create any new entitlements. They take dollars currently going to support a socialist system and put them back into the hands of parents, to be spent in a growing private marketplace of competing schools.

Confusing tax relief--letting someone keep his or her own money--with a subsidy or an entitlement is a common mistake among liberals and statist. The premise is that a family's income belongs, not to those who earned it, but to the government, and the family must petition the government to keep some of it. That notion is, of course, repugnant to libertarians and many others. It is surprising, therefore, to find it embraced in this case by the anti-voucher separationists.

They Do Not Trust People to Make Their Own Decisions

Anti-voucher separationists are afraid that vouchers will come with strings attached, thereby compromising the

independence and creativity of participating schools. They fear that school administrators, always hungry for money, will be easy targets for government bureaucrats who come bearing gifts. They are afraid that "good" private schools that refuse to accept the vouchers will be unable to compete with "bad" private schools that do. They are afraid, in short, that other people do not see as clearly as they do the danger inherent in accepting government funds.

All of their fear is, perhaps, understandable. But it is all fundamentally wrong. Ludwig von Mises rebutted the presumption that the general public is too stupid to resist the false promises of expanded government:

The outlook of many eminent champions of genuine liberalism is rather pessimistic today. As they see it, the vitriolic slogans of the socialists and interventionists call forth a better response from the masses than the cool reasoning of judicious men. . . . It is not true that the ideas of genuine liberalism are too complicated to appeal to the untutored mind of the average voter.²⁶

Anti-voucher separationists should have a higher regard for the wisdom and wits of the average mother and father. In this, they are little different from voucher critics on the left, who claim that specially trained bureaucrats care more for the well-being of children than do parents.

Similarly, economists tell us that knowledge in a free society is widely dispersed and no one individual can have it all. We must therefore submit to the superior wisdom embedded in and revealed by social and economic processes. We trust that impersonal markets will reveal who "really" wants something and at what price. That same humility should lead us to give parents and school administrators the opportunity to decide for themselves whether vouchers are a blessing or a curse. To take away from them that choice, because of our own fears and a presumption of superior understanding, is morally and intellectually indefensible.

They Imagine That the Trend toward Increased Regulation and Government Control Is Irreversible

So great is their fear of government control that anti-voucher separationists would rather live with socialism than dare to experiment with privatization.

The faulty assumption here is that the "road to serfdom" identified by Hayek is a one-way road for all time, and any proposed reforms that still involve public funding--even proposals that dramatically scale back government's capacity to commit evil and set the stage for further privatization in the future--will lead to dependency, government control, and decline. But if that were true, why did Hayek even bother to write The Road to Serfdom? Why do we get up in the morning to spend the day fighting Leviathan if we are convinced it cannot be defeated?

In "Trends Can Change," Mises reveals the third flaw in the anti-voucher position:

One of the cherished dogmas implied in contemporary fashionable doctrines is the belief that tendencies of social evolution as manifested in the recent past will prevail in the future too. Study of the past, it is assumed, discloses the shape of things to come. Any attempt to reverse or even to stop a trend is doomed to failure. Man must submit to the irresistible power of historical destiny.²⁷

The "contemporary fashionable doctrines" Mises refers to are the theories of history and progress advanced by Hegel, Marx, and Comte. But they could just as easily be the doctrines of anti-voucher separationists. The "cherished dogma" is the same for both: the inability to stop the trend toward greater government power and control. An obvious consequence of that dogma is paralysis: the anti-voucherites are afraid to dismantle the government schools because any such effort "is doomed to failure."

Critics of vouchers say that so long as government plays any role in financing education, it must inevitably control, regulate, demoralize, and deny ownership to customers and providers. What proof do they have for that claim? Perhaps as much, or as little, as Mises found for the Marxist dogmas of the 1950s.

Today the doctrine of the irreversibility of prevailing trends has supplanted the Marxian doctrine concerning the inevitability of progressive impoverishment. Now this doctrine is devoid of any logical or experimental verification. Historical trends do not necessarily go on for ever.²⁸

They Overlook the Fact That the Current System Is Neither Free nor Just

Opposition to vouchers from the conservative or libertarian perspective seems, to us, to reflect an inverted view of current realities. Such critics place their fear of compromising the independence of a very small number of schools above the real, alarming, and widespread injustice of the present public school cartel. The public schools' near monopoly of education in America poses, to the true conservative or libertarian, a genuine threat to all of our other liberties, including those of religion, association, and speech. Dismantling that monopoly for the benefit of millions of children should be our highest priority; we should, of course, at the same time look out for the independence of the small number of religious schools now surviving against all odds.

Of all private schools, approximately 86 percent are religiously affiliated. Of total private school enrollment, Catholic schools account for approximately half, while Protestant schools account for 28 percent.²⁹ But only 12 percent of students in the United States today attend private schools.

Anti-voucher separationists point to the schools serving that 12 percent as a precious remnant of the free enterprise system that would be destroyed by vouchers. But the great majority of private schools--and virtually every Catholic school--would not hesitate to accept vouchers so long as the school choice program had reasonable restrictions on government regulation of participating schools.³⁰ Participation in voucher plans is never mandatory: those who manage private schools are free to remain outside the program if they believe the accompanying regulations are too burdensome.

Schools that are so unique or unconventional that they would not be eligible to participate in a choice program would probably lose very few students precisely because they do offer a unique product. Such schools already exist despite the presence of "free" government schools that typically outspend them two or three to one. A voucher plan would not significantly worsen their odds of survival.

It is too easy to romanticize the independence and superiority of today's private schools. Why, if those schools are so much better than government schools, have their enrollments as a percentage of total enrollment remained nearly unchanged since 1965?³¹ One reason may be

that nonprofit private schools often are not much different from government schools. Another reason is that they are simply unable to compete against a lavishly funded "free" public service. Vouchers overcome both problems by making possible a new generation of more efficient and effective private schools and by giving more parents both the reason and the ability to choose a private school. At long last, a "flight to quality" could occur.

**Complete Separation "in a Single Bound"
Is Unlikely to Occur**

A recent opinion poll produced by an anti-voucher separationist group apparently shows that 26 percent of the people polled were willing to entertain the notion that the state should stop funding education. We join the anti-choice separationists in celebrating the fact that that number is much higher than any of us would have expected it to be. But opinion polls often show support for educational choice and vouchers to be as high as 80 percent before the inevitable, massive, and well-funded negative campaigns of the education establishment. California's Proposition 174 was at 66 percent approval only a few months before it lost two to one.

Think of how much more difficult it would have been to mount a referendum effort for complete separation. Who would have funded the media campaign to defend it against union attacks and distortions? By how large a margin would such a referendum have failed?

What do the anti-voucher separationists offer instead of vouchers? Vague promises that the government schools will "collapse" in time, if only we wait long enough. "Plans" that consist of abolishing the Department of Education and regulations on private schools and ending tax support for government education are all fine and worthy objectives, but objectives are not plans. They fairly scream at us the obvious question: how do we get there from here?

Anti-voucher separationists criticize the first step in the right direction (vouchers) because it does not immediately take us to the ultimate destination (separation), arguing--with utter implausibility--that in some glorious day to come we will get there in one grand leap. That is a prescription and an excuse for standing still. And, in fact, that is what the anti-voucher separationist philosophy has delivered for nearly half a century.

Government schools have grown stronger, not weaker, during the past two decades, as shown by their ability to extract more funding from taxpayers. Between 1980 and 1990 real per pupil spending on government schooling rose 33.5 percent.³² Real per pupil spending rose 35.5 percent in the 10 years before 1980.³³ Is that a trend away from government schooling?

Urging the most concerned and informed parents to remove their children from government schools and enroll them in private schools is another favorite recommendation of the anti-voucher separationists. But that has not slowed the growth of government schooling. Perversely, such urging may have accelerated its growth by removing from its path those citizens who could most effectively resist it. Private schools today act as safety valves for the government schools: they enable just enough upset parents to leave the system to keep the Rube Goldberg contraption running.

Whatever its merits ideologically, complete separation is currently a political fantasy. Vouchers offer a halfway house to wean the public from their addiction to government provision of education. By removing institutional barriers to privatization and setting in motion a dynamic that ensures further movement toward competition and choice, vouchers are a necessary step toward complete separation.

The Moral Requirement That We Act Immediately

While we debate with the anti-voucher separationists the fate of the tiny number of students who might somehow be adversely affected by the creation of a competitive educational system, 42 million children remain trapped in a system where government owns the buildings, hires the teachers, employs the principals, determines the curricula, and oversees testing and evaluation. Because they ignore those children, anti-voucher separationists can blithely claim that they should not have to come up with a nonvoucher plan to privatize the schools.

The gravest threat to American capitalism and democracy is what is currently happening in the government schools:

- Millions of children are not being adequately taught to read or write and so enter society without the skills needed to become contributing members. This is one of the largest yet most overlooked roots of crime, drug abuse, domestic violence, and the many other problems that plague our society.

- Children are being indoctrinated with creeds and dogmas that are profoundly at odds with the values of their parents and with what is needed to genuinely understand the world as it really exists. Radical environmentalism, political correctness, and more have become standard elements of high school and even elementary school curricula.
- Children are being sold drugs, recruited into gangs, introduced to sex, and sometimes caught in the cross-fire of gang wars while on school property. Instead of being places of peace and safety in a community, many inner-city government schools resemble war zones and barely contained riots.

An accurate understanding of the current system makes it plain that while the interests of the 12 percent in private schools or the 1 or 2 percent who might be hurt by a voucher plan are important and must not be overlooked, it is cruel indeed to overlook the calamity facing the 88 percent now trapped in government schools. Our first concern should be saving the millions of children now put at risk in government schools. And once that becomes our first concern, we understand the need for a plan to get from here to there, and the vital role that vouchers play in the movement for complete separation of school and state.

When government school teachers oppose vouchers, they do so out of roughly equal parts self-interest and self-delusion. Many teachers know their salaries are higher than what they could earn, with the same level of effort, in the competitive marketplace. And it is profoundly difficult for people to understand that their dedicated efforts and hard work could be contributing to a massive and ongoing crime against kids. It is the system, not most of the people in it, that needs replacement. For those reasons, we find it possible to forgive government school teachers for opposing the voucher movement.

But conservative and libertarian critics of vouchers know that millions of kids are being consigned every day to schools that do not work, some of which are little more than warehouses or prisons. They know that conditions in those prisons are getting more dangerous and more destructive of character and mind with each passing day. They know how grave a threat government ownership, operation, and control of schools pose to democracy, liberty, and prosperity. They know, yet they do nothing.

We have yet to see an anti-voucher separationist take responsibility for the fate of kids currently attending government schools. But shouldn't the separationists do so? They know what crimes are taking place and yet they oppose efforts to save millions of children. How can they not be responsible?

Ideas must be judged by their results, not the intentions of their proponents. The results of anti-voucher rhetoric are to spread unfounded fears among parents with children in private schools and to diminish respect for the principals and other private school leaders who will choose whether or not to accept tax-funded vouchers. We fail to see how that strengthens private schools or weakens the government school cartel.

Conclusion

Philosopher George Santayana defined fanaticism as redoubling your efforts when you have forgotten your aim. That characterization, unfortunately, suits conservatives and libertarians who oppose efforts to begin the process of privatizing schools with vouchers. Decrying mere improvement as the enemy of the ideal, they do more to thwart the separation of school and state than to advance it.

Those of us who have served on the front lines of the fight for school choice are working to limit the power of the state; to expand the responsibility and authority of parents; and, most of all, to rescue real children from the life-ruining effects of government schools. We never thought we would see the day when people we considered allies in the fight for liberty would become the handmaidens of the education bureaucracy and the National Education Association. But that is precisely what is happening.

Those who favor separation of school and state have every right to publicly declare their goals and debate the best strategies to achieve them. But if they want to change the status quo, they need to recognize the strength of those who oppose change and devise strategies that exploit their weaknesses. To actually change public policy, separationists must build coalitions with those whose goals, as Lord Acton wrote, may differ from their own. Careless words and criticism directed at members of such coalitions set back the movement toward separation.

School choice offers hope. It is politically possible now, not sometime in a romanticized future. It would set in

motion the changes needed to make further privatization and separation possible.

We call on all who are serious about separating school and state to join us in taking this bold first step.

Notes

1. Milton Friedman, "The Role of Government in Education," in Economics and the Public Interest, ed. Robert A. Solo (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955), pp. 127-34.
2. Virgil C. Blum, Freedom of Choice in Education (New York: Macmillan, 1958).
3. Ibid., p. 36.
4. John Stuart Mill, On Liberty (Northbrook, Ill.: AHM Publishing, 1947), p. 108.
5. Herbert Spencer, The Man versus the State (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1960), p. 37.
6. Ibid., p. 29.
7. Friedrich Hayek, The Constitution of Liberty (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 394.
8. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 395.
9. Chester Finn and Diane Ravitch, "Magna Charter?" Policy Review, no. 74 (Fall 1995): 41.
10. For Diane Ravitch's latest thoughts on the subject, see National Standards in American Education: A Citizen's Guide (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1995).
11. E. S. Savas, Privatizing the Public Sector (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1982), pp. 68-69.
12. Blum, pp. 23-37.
13. Ibid., p. 37.
14. Conservatives may rightly point to the decision by a few private colleges, such as Hillsdale College in Michigan, to refuse to accept government funds because of anti-discrimination rules that accompany such funds. But thousands of

high-quality private schools have not found it so difficult to comply with those requirements. Moreover, no one claims that a college's decision to accept Pell Grants, for example, has led to restrictions on what courses can be taught or the content of courses.

15. Blum, p. 34.

16. Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S. 603, 612-13 (1971). See Mueller v. Allen, 51 L.W. 5050 and 103 S.Ct. 3062 (1983) for a more recent confirmation of the Court's views on this issue.

17. Proposition 174, section (b)(4); emphasis added. For further comment on this section, see David Harmer, School Choice: Why You Need It--How You Get It (Washington: Cato Institute, 1994), p. 95. For the full text of Proposition 174, see *ibid.*, pp. 86-101.

18. See "Americans' Views on Education Issues," U.S. News & World Report, April 1, 1996, p. 54; and Ann Bradley, "Public Backing for Schools Is Called Tenuous," Education Week 15, no. 7 (October 18, 1995): 1, 3.

19. See Jeanne Allen, "What Americans Really Think of School Choice," Wall Street Journal, September 17, 1996, p. A16.

20. For a thorough discussion of the power of teachers' unions in the United States, see Charlene Haar, Myron Lieberman, and Leo Troy, The NEA and AFT: Teacher Unions in Power and Politics (Rockport, Mass.: ProActive Publications, n.d.).

21. See Milton Friedman, "Public Schools: Make Them Private," Washington Post, February 19, 1995.

22. We believe vouchers are effective in inner cities, as evidenced by a 1996 study of test scores of students participating in the Milwaukee choice plan. See Jay P. Greene et al., "The Effectiveness of School Choice in Milwaukee: A Secondary Analysis of Data from the Program's Evaluation," August 1996, available from the authors.

23. See Myron Lieberman, Public Education: An Autopsy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), chap. 2, pp. 17-44, for a compelling discussion of those trends.

24. See Eric A. Hanushek et al., Making Schools Work: Improving Performance and Controlling Costs (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1994), for the latest evidence show-

ing no relation between spending and student achievement.

25. See John Coons, "Intellectual Liberty and the Schools," Journal of Law, Ethics, and Public Policy 1 (1985): 513ff.

26. Ludwig von Mises, "The Political Chances of Genuine Liberalism," in Planning for Freedom (South Holland, Ill.: Libertarian Press, 1980), pp. 180-81.

27. Ludwig von Mises, "Trends Can Change," in Planning for Freedom, p. 173.

28. Ibid., p. 176.

29. Thomas James and Henry M. Levin, Comparing Public and Private Schools, vol. 1, Institutions and Organizations (New York: Falmer, 1988), p. 34.

30. When state legislation was passed in Wisconsin expanding the Milwaukee pilot voucher program, 102 of the city's 120 private schools signed up to participate. The National Catholic Education Association is a strong proponent of school choice. See Jeff Archer, "NCEA's 1st Lay President Rides in on Waves of Change," Education Week, June 1, 1996.

31. Private-sector K-12 enrollment was 13.8 percent of total public and private enrollment in 1970, 11.5 percent in 1980, and 11.3 percent in 1990. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 1993 (Washington: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1993), p. 12.

32. Ibid., p. 164.

33. Ibid.

Dewey, continued from page 3

idea of tax-funded vouchers (hereafter "vouchers") as a way of reducing some of the inequalities and natural inefficiencies of the government schooling monopoly. Not until a quarter century later in Free to Choose (1979) did he and Rose Friedman adopt the more ambitious goal of the ultimate elimination of state compulsion and provision and funding of education. Nowhere in Free to Choose, however, did the Friedmans claim that vouchers would reach that goal. On the contrary, the Friedmans predicted that vouchers would improve and enhance the dominance of government schools in communities where government schools are "reasonably satisfactory." In such places, the Friedmans maintained, "not even the most comprehensive voucher plan would have much effect."¹ By 1995 Milton Friedman claimed that vouchers would have the effect of moving "away from a government system to a private system," but added that if he were wrong about that prediction, he would no longer support them.²

As the evidence of inherent flaws of government schooling grew, Friedman's own sharpening analysis led him to support the risky and unpopular view that government need not fund, compel, or provide education. He showed courage and integrity in openly adopting views on education widely perceived as "radical." As a world-renowned scholar who had long enjoyed wide affection and respect, he had more to lose than most. Yet, while 41 years of careful scholarship have made Friedman's diagnosis more severe, his remedy remains untouched.

Sometimes it seems that supporters of vouchers arrive at the solution before they have defined the problem. It is not surprising, then, to hear such an eclectic chorus of arguments voiced in support of vouchers. A sampling of arguments for vouchers might be broken into rough categories:

- Humanitarian. There is a moral imperative to immediately liberate millions of low-income children from dangerous and failing schools.
- Religious. Vouchers would give traditionally religious families a way to flee the ideological exotica purveyed in government schools.
- Civil rights. Vouchers would expand the right of free expression by permitting parents to educate their children in accordance with their own beliefs.

- Political. Vouchers would offer a unique opportunity for the Republican Party to make inroads among minority voters.
- "Social justice." Government subsidy of education should be truly universal and not arbitrarily exclude religious and private schools. Also, the poor deserve the same choices as the rich.
- Competition. Free-market competition among schools would generate better quality public and private schools.
- Save private schools. Vouchers would save thousands of struggling private and religious schools that are providing a great service to the communities where they operate.
- Save government schooling. Vouchers would save government schooling by forcing competition among schools and improvements across the board.

Among those arguments there is much overlap, and most proponents of vouchers agree with several at once with no internal contradiction. But all of the arguments have one thing in common: rather than challenging the premise of government compulsion and funding of education, they embrace it and attempt to make it less bad. Like Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika, vouchers seek, not to repeal socialized schooling, but make it work better.

Whether vouchers can save government schooling, or bolster religious liberty, or bring justice to the poor are certainly issues for debate. But the question that should most concern us is whether vouchers will lead to full educational freedom. Joseph Bast and David Harmer contend that vouchers will not save government schooling; they will end it by challenging the government's monopoly over the provision of education, undercutting the power of unions, and creating a huge market for new education providers that will set us on a course to full privatization.

Although Bast and Harmer concede that vouchers would leave intact the twin pillars of government schooling, funding and compulsion, they argue that vouchers will begin a domino effect of parental independence from government that will ultimately tear down the whole structure of government monopoly schooling. I believe the opposite. The temporary, or strategic, embrace of funding and compulsion envisioned by Bast and Harmer will have enduring effects

that cut off the path to freedom. Their intention is to expand the existing entitlement to education (by including private schools) in order to stimulate a gradual rejection of that entitlement--to phase it out by making it larger.

If we were to make food stamps or day-care vouchers more flexible and universal, we might swell the net of government dependency by ensnaring a larger variety of private vendors. But would it make people less dependent on government for food or child care? Or would it further entrench those people's dependency by making it less obvious and onerous? The whole separationist case for vouchers rests on the improbable hope that making a government subsidy less rigid and overt will transform dependent parents into self-reliant parents by sparing them the trouble of becoming self-reliant on their own. To rework the old saying, you can take the dependent parent out of the government school, but you can't take the dependency out of the parent.

Moreover, even if vouchers could bring an end to government provision of education, we would be left with a vast system of government contractors and parents with "school stamps," a massive Medicare-style lobby for ever-increasing subsidies. Only a tiny percentage of parents would continue footing the bill themselves, and their clamors for educational freedom would be drowned out by those demanding larger subsidies.

Bast and Harmer remind us of Lord Acton's observation that "at all times, sincere friends of freedom have been rare" and have necessarily forged alliances with "auxiliaries whose objects often differed from their own" in order to serve the cause of freedom. Granting that to be the case, what lucid criterion can be applied to discern the worthiness of a given alliance?

Generally speaking, the greater the divergence of purpose within an alliance, the more critical the need for strictly limited and clearly defined goals, lest the cause of principle be subsumed by the exigencies of political advantage. A key difficulty with vouchers is that the great majority of their proponents do not share the bold and principled goals of Bast and Harmer; many, indeed, would be alarmed and embarrassed by the claim that vouchers would set in motion the inexorable destruction of government schooling. Today's leading proponents of vouchers, including Lamar Alexander, Gov. Tommy Thompson, and Bob Dole, would both reject the separationist goal and dispute that vouchers could ever bring it about. Why is that a problem?

Because those are the people carrying the ball and cutting the deals. When the product being sold is an idea (like vouchers), it is not long before the product matches the rhetoric. In his presidential campaign Dole unabashedly pitched vouchers as a form of welfare that Republicans favor out of concern for the poor and Democrats oppose by order of the unions. In the main, Republicans have adopted vouchers as a way to embarrass Democrats who owe their election to the teachers' unions. As a political ploy, the value of voucher plans is unclear; what is more certain is that there is no firm connection between their perceived political value and their likelihood of bringing down government schooling.

It is no surprise that when the politicians are in charge, things get political. In Free to Choose, the Friedmans warned of the possibility of voucher programs' being "sabotaged by excessively rigid standards of 'approval.'"³ After the torrential defeat of California's Proposition 174 voucher initiative in 1993, John Walton, one of the largest financiers of vouchers in the country, backed a more moderate follow-up initiative called the Quality Schools Initiative, which spared any need for sabotage. Expressing his disdain, Milton Friedman called the Walton plan "welfare vouchers" and stated that if "I were a member of the teacher's union, I would welcome the initiative with open arms."⁴ Among other flaws, the plan included a gauntlet of qualifying requirements for voucher-redeeming private schools including accreditation; teacher credentialing; and vaguely defined standards for hiring, admissions, enrollment, and curricula. And to ensure that the public trust would not be violated, the Walton plan granted full authority to qualify voucher-redeeming private schools to the state superintendent of public instruction! After withering criticism from conservatives and fellow voucher proponents like Friedman, the plan was withdrawn by its sponsors.

Thus we see the political Catch-22 that vouchers present: the more their proponents seek to make them palatable to monopolists and the general public in order to secure passage, the more they will shed the very features that make them attractive to separationists and thereby lose the support of those people. A hard-line voucher cannot pass, and a watered-down voucher will not advance separation.

Plan B from "the Blob"

Some proponents of vouchers take the education establishment's abhorrence of vouchers as a sign of their inher-

ent virtue and an indicator of their likelihood to bring down the monopoly. They take "the blob" at its word. But does blob opposition make virtue inherent to vouchers? Although it may be true that vouchers cause more genuine consternation to the establishment than do other reforms, there is nothing especially revealing about their opposition. Like all monopolies and bureaucracies, the education establishment resists everything it perceives as change. Anything that is not strictly within its interest, such as new programs, better pay, and higher taxes, it opposes. At first.

All reforms are imposed on the system from without, with great effort, over many years. Remember when merit pay was a dangerous idea? It was once said that magnet schools would destroy neighborhood schools; alternative certification threatened teacher quality; standards and testing were rigid, penal, and stigmatizing; charter schools could not be held accountable to the public interest; and "public school choice" undermined the whole idea of the common school. Every one of those "bold" reforms was met with siegellike resistance until relentless pressure made them inevitable, and sometimes even popular within the educational establishment.

And as every frustrated reformer knows, the passage of any reform law is just the beginning. If a reform survives with any teeth following the compromises that make possible its passage, it must then be implemented, usually as a pilot program, then carefully studied by independent researchers loyal to the unions, after which the need for further modifications will be discovered. And all that bold reforming must be carried out in strict conformity with state and federal civil rights laws and affirmative action goals, and with due consideration of cultural and linguistic diversity, gender issues, access for the disabled, and other organized sensitivities.

Today, now that most of the shining reforms of the last 20 years have been safely redefined and neutered by the establishment, we can look forward to the tremendous difference they will not make. Allyson Tucker, director of the conservative Individual Rights Foundation and a strong supporter of vouchers, recently noted that phenomenon with respect to charter schools. She complained that when the unions were unable to bury the charter school concept, they "did an about-face . . . and now claim to support charter school legislation as long as it is 'properly crafted.'" But, she observes, what they support is "in reality weak and ineffective." Now "the statement 'I support charter

schools' means virtually nothing."⁵ During his first presidential debate against Bob Dole, President Clinton said, "I support school choice." He was probably referring to the "properly crafted" kind.

The recent history of education "reform" should give proponents of vouchers pause in their Davidic aspirations of slaying the government Goliath. No matter how well stones are aimed, that giant absorbs them into its smothering vastness. Bast and Harmer point to the recent embrace of vouchers by the liberal Washington Post and Chicago Tribune as evidence of vouchers' political viability. That embrace might better be seen as evidence that vouchers have turned the corner and are headed down the same path of co-option and confinement as charter schools.

Like the perestroikan reforms before them, vouchers work within the system of government compulsion and funding. If that compulsion and funding are accepted (even if only strategically), voucher programs become trapped within the government system's cogs and wheels. Any plan that involves government money must first pass through the meat grinder of legislatures and courts, only to be implemented by the same people it is attempting to reform, and finally monitored and regulated by the courts and legislatures into eternity. That is why all such reforms are, as Irving Kristol put it, "guaranteed to be worse than nothing."⁶

Moreover, while other reforms may be futile, they at least possess the virtue of containing their damage within the system, like children messing up their own rooms. When national standards unleashed a history framework that placed more emphasis on Vanuatu than on Virginia, for example, private schools were free to continue teaching actual American history. By breaking down the funding barriers between government and private schools, vouchers may subject private schools to all the "benefits" of future education reforms.

We have already seen that with California's Proposition 174, which clearly tied voucher-receiving schools to "national standards." Friedman pointed out that the Walton voucher plan was so compromised and ill-conceived that it would have been good for the teachers' unions. As voucher plans become increasingly compromised in pursuit of proximate victory, the time will come when the establishment will say, "We support vouchers, too."

Government Vouchers Equal Government Control

The question of whether private schools can retain their autonomy while accepting vouchers touches several levels of debate. Ethically, we must "first, do no harm" in our attempts to heal. Even if we could be sure that vouchers would liberate some students, we cannot consciously trade off the freedom of one group, no matter how small, for the liberty of the majority. How many of us would sell 10 free men into slavery in exchange for the manumission of 90 slaves?

Strategically, the question of autonomy is paramount. If the distinctiveness of private schools is lost, then so is the whole "free-market" case for "school choice," since it hinges on the competition provided by more educationally effective private schools. And if vouchers threaten the autonomy of today's mostly nonprofit schools, what makes us believe that new, for-profit schools without underlying ideological agendas to defend would fare any better?

Before leaping into the great unknown, perhaps we should take a look at the known. The two most comparable precedents for vouchers are the records of government subsidy of higher education and state funding of private and religious elementary and secondary schools in other countries.

The Record of Higher Education

The example of postsecondary education in America is crucial. American colleges and universities have been touted as the best in the world. In many ways they are--in the kinds of advanced research, diverse programs of study, and unparalleled opportunities for scholars that attract students from all around the globe. But the praise for American postsecondary education is largely confined to the "leading edge"--to the kinds of advanced, specialized, and technical studies available to the best scholars, especially at the graduate level. There is much less explicit praise for the way our colleges and universities educate the average undergraduate.

And for good reason. In recent years a profusion of literature has exposed the failings of American college and university education, from spiraling costs to the rising tide of political correctness and thought control, from the denigration of teaching in favor of lucrative research to the rise of wasteful and frivolous programs of study, from

the growing dominance of Marxist and feminist thought in academia to the balkanization of major universities into racial/ethnic/religious/gender tribes. So-called liberal education has turned to profoundly illiberal ends.

It would take a lifetime of study to explain just how postsecondary education has gotten into its present state. But clearly, government policies to create a mass market for higher education (which began, significantly, with the G.I. Bill of Rights) and to cajole or force universities to advance certain social policy goals (scientific and defense research, racial integration, gender neutrality, cultural assimilation, and so on) have had a controlling impact on higher education, and much that was best in American education is at risk of being lost as a result. For the best students and the children of the elite, college can still be an outstanding, life-changing experience. For the average student, the benefits are not so clear, except that a college degree has become the basic job-qualifying credential that a high school degree used to be.

Finally, apart from their effects on the quality of higher education, have the G.I. Bill, Pell Grants, guaranteed student loans, and other programs at least made college more affordable? Quite the reverse. In 1943, the year before the G.I. Bill was passed, the average annual tuition at a private college was \$2,570, in constant 1995 dollars. In 1995 it was \$14,510, nearly a sixfold increase. For public colleges, the average tuition in 1943 was \$820; in 1995 it was \$2,982, or three and one-half times more.⁷ Whether for cucumbers, cars, or college, the rule of thumb is that subsidies increase cost, and our experience with higher education has been no exception.

The history of state and federal subsidy of postsecondary education has been one of declining quality at an escalating cost. Do we want private elementary and secondary education to follow the same path?

Even allowing for several important differences between college and K-12 schooling, the legal framework for government control is already in place. Ronald Trowbridge, vice president for external programs and communications at Hillsdale College, warns that since 1988 the Civil Rights Restoration Act has deemed entire institutions subject to federal regulation when such institutions enroll students bearing federal aid. The act was careful to include elementary and secondary schools.⁸

Warnings from Abroad

The long-standing precedent in other nations of government aid flowing to private and religious schools offers little cause for optimism. As Charles Glenn points out at the conclusion of his admirable survey, Choice of Schools in Six Nations,

For those who believe strongly in religious schooling and fear that government influence will come with public funding, reason exists for their concern. Catholic or Protestant schools in each of the nations studied have increasingly been assimilated to the assumptions and guiding values of public schooling. This process does not [even] seem to be the result of deliberate efforts . . . but rather of the difficulty, for a private school playing by public rules, to maintain its distance from the common assumptions and habits of the predominant system.⁹

A few sample passages from Glenn's work will give the reader an idea of the typical results of government funding of private education in France, Germany and, Britain.

- In France: "Didier Piveteau lamented that 'because of the close relationship created in 1958 between Catholic and government schools, it may be said that, apart from religion, the curriculum of the Catholic school has no distinctive features.' . . . By 1981, Socialist Minister of Education Alain Savary pointed out, 14 percent of the Catholic schools provided no religious instruction at all and 24 percent of them regarded school climate alone as the essence of their religious instruction."¹⁰

- In Germany: "The choice of a publicly supported Catholic school, for example, may not offer real pedagogical difference given substantial government regulation and pressure for uniformity."¹¹

- In Britain: "The effect of supervision by local education authorities has led to a great deal of uniformity between council and voluntary schools, while secularization has weakened the confessional identity of many of the latter."¹²

World Bank economist Estelle James has surveyed the results of government funding schemes of every variety aimed at enabling families to choose from among government or

religious and private schools. Her work offers equally dim prospects for vouchers. In an article in the International Encyclopedia of Education, James concludes that, in general,

substantial regulations usually accompany large subsidies. These regulations are similar to those applied to public schools; typically they specify hiring and firing procedures, credentials and salaries of teachers, criteria for selecting students, price and expenditures per student, and participants in the school's decision-making structure. In particular, they raise salaries and other costs while lowering private price and contributions. . . . Large private sectors in developed countries are heavily subsidized, heavily controlled and, in fact, these forces lead them to behave very much like the public sector.¹³

In a survey of public policies toward private education in a sample of 35 developed and developing countries, James draws two major conclusions regarding the effects of government subsidy of private education. First, that "private educational sectors in developing countries tend to be less subsidized (and less controlled) than in developed countries, yet they are also larger." Second, "government controls over private schools are found even without subsidies. However, heavy controls invariably accompany subsidies, particularly over teacher salaries and qualifications, price and other entrance criteria."¹⁴

Last, in her extensive study of Australia's policy of limited privatization begun in 1973, James concludes that "another consequence" of the experiment "was the increasing regulation and centralization of decisions and the loss of private school autonomy which limited the feasible range of options and will probably continue to do so in the future . . . most of these consequences were generic and would probably follow if this system were adopted in other countries."¹⁵

Faced with the experience of government funding of education in other nations and our own very mixed record of government aid to college students, proponents of vouchers may of course answer that America is different from the rest of the world, and that higher education is not the legal and political equivalent of elementary and secondary education. Those objections are correct as far as they go, but there are additional reasons to expect our experience with vouchers to follow similar lines, namely, the record of voucher plans that have already been proposed.

Real Vouchers

Voucher plans must be evaluated one at a time, as they are written and proposed. Although vouchers are a bad idea in theory, they are much worse in practice.

In November 1995 House Republicans passed a pilot voucher program for the District of Columbia only to see it held up in a Senate committee by fellow Republican Sen. James Jeffords of Vermont. After more than two months of political tussling, a compromise version ultimately surfaced from the House-Senate Conference Committee. It was a voucher critic's dream. Among its provisions was a requirement that all participating private schools submit written assurance that no student receiving a voucher would be required to "attend or participate in a religious class or religious ceremony without the written consent of such student's parent."¹⁶ That is a stab at the heart of what makes private education a desirable choice: its mission. The mantra of government schooling is that since we cannot all agree on one mission, we will have no mission. As G. K. Chesterton wryly put it, "We cannot decide what is good, but let us give it to our children."¹⁷ To accept the notion that it is reasonable for children to be permitted to attend a school while opting out of its mission is to accept the premise of mission-free government schooling. "We don't have a mission, so you don't need one either."

But a second provision contained in the D.C. voucher bill was even more blatant. No part of the voucher could be used for religious purposes. That meant that no part of the voucher could serve a religious school's mission. Since the amount of the voucher (\$1,500 or \$3,000 depending on family income) would have covered more than half (up to all) of the tuition at most religious schools, voucher-redeeming religious schools would have had to certify that most of their curriculum was religion free, that is to say, mission free.

What specifically do we mean by a school's religious character, or autonomy? Taking the example of Catholic education, which currently accounts for more than half of all children in nongovernment schools, and much larger percentages in urban areas where vouchers are most likely to be enacted, here are Popes Pius XI and Leo XIII's definitions:

For the mere fact that a school gives some religious instruction (often extremely stinted), does not bring it into accord with the rights of the Church and of the Christian family, or make it

a fit place for Catholic students. To be this, it is necessary that all the teaching and the whole organization of the school, and its teacher, syllabus and textbooks in every branch, be regulated by the Christian spirit, under the direction and maternal supervision of the Church; so that religion may be in very truth the foundation and crown of the youth's entire training. . . . To use the words of Leo XIII: "It is necessary not only that religious instruction be given to the young at certain fixed times, but also that every other subject taught, be permeated with Christian piety. If this is wanting, if this sacred atmosphere does not pervade and warm the hearts of masters and scholars alike, little good can be expected from any kind of learning, and considerable harm will often be the consequence."¹⁸

Clearly, there is no possibility of "separating out" the "religious component" of a Catholic school, its entire nature and substance being religious. Furthermore, Leo XIII makes clear that it would be far better to close a Catholic school than to tolerate any attempt to compartmentalize its curriculum. Yet that is exactly the course suggested by the Friedmans, two of the most libertarian of all proponents of vouchers: the subdivision of church schools into secular instruction during the day and religious instruction on Sunday or after school.¹⁹ Brilliant champions of freedom that they are, the Friedmans are not Catholic and can be forgiven their erroneous assumptions about the nature and purpose of Catholic education.

Proponents of vouchers are quick to note that no school would ever be forced to accept the voucher. That is true enough, but look at the Sophie's Choice that vouchers put before parents and private schools. A Christian school deeply committed to its mission may bite the bullet and refuse to accept the voucher; but a less committed Christian school down the street decides it can live with the regulations and oversight and accepts the voucher. Some parents from the first school decide they can get roughly the same result from the voucher-redeeming school down the street and beat a fast path to free Christian schooling. The first school may now be faced with the prospects of dropping its music program, not renovating a gym in bad repair, or even closing its doors. The mere existence of the voucher pits mission-compromising schools against uncompromising schools, with the upper hand given to the compromisers.

For many religious schools, keeping their doors open is a constant struggle. But since diluting their mission does not buy them a thing, they either find a way to keep going or close down. Vouchers like the one proposed for D.C. would give those schools a third choice: stay in business and let that be the new mission.

Once a private school begins accepting vouchers, it is unlikely to go back. Voucher-receiving schools will increase wages and debt for expansion and otherwise assume financial obligations that will make opting out very difficult when more restrictions are imposed.

There is yet another reason to expect increased government regulation of private schools: conservatives will demand it. If they do not, what has become of their commitment to public accountability for public spending? Was presidential candidate Dole really proposing a new \$5 billion federal spending plan with no controls or public accountability? What will happen when neopagan academies or homosexual-oriented schools demand inclusion? Surely conservative remonstrance will resemble that which was heard over the National Endowment for the Arts' funding for the efforts of Andre Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe. To give liberals their due, we can surely expect complementary liberal outrage when segregationist, fundamentalist, or just plain religious schools perceived to be "teaching hate" step up for their vouchers. From both sides the call will go out for stiffer regulation of the curricula of private schools.

The issue of regulatory control accompanying vouchers goes beyond the threat to existing private schools. Free-market proponents of vouchers rest their case for future privatization on the hopes that vouchers would attract legions of innovators and entrepreneurs into a growing for-profit marketplace of education providers. How likely is that? Not very, says David Barulich, a former spokesman for California's Proposition 174 and now an opponent of vouchers. Barulich came to see that any voucher legislation must define, or empower a bureaucracy to define, what an institution qualified to receive a voucher must look like in order to receive tax dollars. Inevitably, that definition will look a lot like current-day schools. Cutting-edge modes of delivering education (distance learning, home education, tutoring, apprenticeships, and the like) will probably be excluded, stymieing the very innovators and entrepreneurs whom voucher proponents had hoped to attract.

Expanding Dependency

Marshall Fritz, founder of the Separation of School and State Alliance in Fresno, California, likes to tell the story of government social workers in the San Joaquin valley who ventured out into the beet fields to recruit farm workers into the welfare system. Faced with budget cuts in the wake of shrinking welfare rolls, the social workers made the case to those poor laborers that they would have more real income on welfare than they were earning by the sweat of their brows. Fritz tells that outrageous (but true) story to illustrate the effect of vouchers on families who already send their children to private schools, namely, vouchers would encourage educationally self-reliant families to become dependent upon government.

Scattered throughout every neighborhood in every state of our nation is a remnant population of families who pay for their own children's education. They are rich and poor and middle class; they are Catholic, Baptist, Jewish, and agnostic; they are liberal, conservative, or neither; and with them rests the whole hope of the future. The remnant is not, after all, the private schools themselves but the parents who believe that they, not government, are responsible for their children's education. The whole message of the welfare state is to disdain sacrifice, to prefer today's creature comforts to abstract notions like liberty and great grandchildren. Vouchers say to the remnant parents, "stop sacrificing!" when sacrifice is the essence of strong families and the hallmark of free peoples.

Beyond Vouchers

Bast and Harmer decry (what they perceive to be) the lack of alternatives to vouchers and use it as an argument in their favor. Even if there were no alternatives to vouchers (which there are), that would not make them a good idea by default. Imagine two physicians trying to cure a chronically ill patient with little success. Dr. Jones proposes giving the patient a tincture that Dr. Smith thinks is poison. Smith attempts to prove to Jones that the tincture is poison, but Jones persists in his belief that it must be medicine because Smith has no remedy to offer in its place. Many conservatives and libertarians, having carefully considered the risks and failings of vouchers, continue to support them half-heartedly for lack of perceived alternatives.

The following brief list of alternative strategies does not offer further evidence of the inadequacy of vouchers, but it demonstrates that our options are far better than "vouchers or nothing."

1. Repeal compulsory attendance laws. Here is an objective that proponents of vouchers, with all their resources, organizational skills, and political savvy, could pursue with zeal. The popular cause for their repeal is that children who do not want to be in school are not doing much learning and are disrupting the learning of those who do want to be in school. Compulsory attendance laws force bad apples to stay in school and spoil the whole barrel. The separationist case for repealing compulsory attendance laws is that it will remove from the state a great source of its power and pretense of authority and deal a tremendous blow in the popular imagination to the idea of government schooling. Without compulsory attendance laws, the state would have no power to accredit teachers, establish curricula, or define a school. Under those conditions, a whole range of tax-related schemes that enable families to keep more of their own money, such as tax rebates, tuition deductions, and "opt-out" provisions, may be comparatively risk free to schools and parents and worthy of pursuit.

2. Encourage home education. Repealing compulsory attendance laws would also begin to sever the Siamese-twinning of "school" and "education." Already home education is challenging the myth of institutional learning that says, "I spent 12 years in a box; everyone I know did the same; therefore it is the only way children can learn." Hundreds of thousands of home-educated children have proved that they can get a much better education outside the system. The pernicious corollary to institutional schooling is that "only professionals" can be teachers. Again, the tremendous success of uncredentialed parents contradicts that assumption. The false premises of institutional learning metastasize into the system with which we are now burdened. The need for special buildings leads to school zones, districts, boards, and departments; buses to get to them; and massive infrastructures to keep everything humming. Nonparent teachers lead to a professional teaching class, which gives us unions and the competing interests of teachers and families. And group instruction gives us the fragmented, depersonalized, dumbed-down, and expensive factory curriculum. All of which adds up to thousands of extra dollars per

student each year. An ordinary at-home mother can teach her three children for \$1,000 a year out-of-pocket, and they learn as much as, or more than, they would in an institutional system that costs an average of \$6,000 per pupil. Home education collapses the widespread belief that education is so expensive that we must have government funding and so difficult that we must hire professionals. Emerging technology and the successful example of a million home-educated children will continue to make this perfect indictment of government schooling a growing and viable option.

3. Liberate the poor. Privately funded vouchers, or scholarships for low-income children, are working quietly behind the scenes to accomplish the purported goals of government-funded vouchers. Businesses, foundations, and individuals contribute to a fund that pays a portion of tuition to help low-income families send their children to the private schools of their choice. In all the programs, even the poorest families are required to put up a goodly share (typically half or more) of the tuition themselves, and they do. Like home education, low-income scholarships demonstrate that poor families can be just as responsible as middle- and upper-income families. Privately funded choice programs now operate in 30 localities and serve more than 10,000 low-income children. The average scholarship is only \$1,000, so a lot can be done at a modest cost. In 1993 I cofounded a program in Washington, D.C., that now helps 225 children attend 61 different private schools. Our scholarship program enjoys support from prominent Republicans, Democrats, and business and community leaders of every political persuasion.

Americans already give \$125 billion a year to charities and \$21 billion more for higher education scholarships. In Washington, D.C., for example, \$18 million would be sufficient to send 18,000 children (about one-third of all low-income children in the capital) to a private school while the cost of maintaining those same children in a government school is closer to \$180 million, 10 times as much. And that would be accomplished without any government interference with the missions or methods of private schools.

Apart from the great good they do for the families who participate, low-income scholarships are an excellent way to connect the "haves" with the "have-nots," deepening the stakes of interdependence that give

integrity and vitality to communities. Low-income scholarships may not yet be able to help every needy family, or even most of them, but they are an effective leveraging strategy for undermining the belief that poor people cannot or will not educate their children without government.

4. Exodus. Religious conservatives, libertarians, and others should, instead of trying to make government schools a little less hostile to traditional sensibilities, shake the dust from their feet and leave. Millions of families chafe under the weight of a system that openly disrespects their beliefs, in the vain hope that they can transform a system that is hostile to parental rights by design. The structure of government schooling would not long remain standing if millions of its most dedicated families pulled out and either sent their children to private schools, built new ones, or taught their children at home. Many of the families "left behind" would have less reason than ever to stay and would follow their more energetic brethren out the door. There is no reason to deny that some portion of the 45 million children in government schools will remain there right up until the day they find a "closed" sign on the door. At that point, their parents will have to decide whether and how they will go about providing the children with an education, just as they see to their feeding, sheltering, and clothing. In other words, they will have to be responsible. That can be frightening, as can many of the most important things that we do in our lives, but the more people assume personal responsibility for their children's education, the more it will come to be seen as a simple and manageable duty common to all parents.

5. Educate. Think tanks, politicians, and academics should stop wasting energy trying to fix government schooling and instead devote themselves to educating the public about its genesis, purpose, and inevitably corrosive effects. We need to shake people's confidence in the idea of government schooling, not reassure them. Americans need to know that we were more literate, skilled, and civic minded before government schooling was imposed in the mid-19th century than we are today; that the great majority of families sent their children to school before compulsory attendance laws were passed; and that the people, politics, and philosophies that launched government schooling are not necessarily the noble things we were taught they are in government schools.²⁰

Many conservatives and libertarians have been educating others about such things as health care, Social Security, and welfare. Let's give education the same treatment. That critical exercise must involve painting an attractive and credible picture of what American education would look like with government gone and parents in charge--a picture we already see emerging with innovative private and home schools.

Other worthy efforts include eradicating the federal role in education, creating rival teachers' associations, and encouraging investment in education technology and service delivery.

Conclusion

Vouchers will decrease private school autonomy while increasing costs for everyone. But those are not my greatest fears. The worst thing that vouchers can do is erase the extant (and reemerging) tradition of parents' taking full responsibility for their children's education. The goal of separating school and state consists not so much of creating private schools as of fostering private responsibility. All the Potemkin marketplaces that vouchers hope to create will not instill in parents a willingness to spend their own money. After a year or two of accepting vouchers, parents now using private education will have found new, indispensable ways of spending the money they used to put into their children's tuition. The old habit of educational self-reliance will have declined, and they will soon find themselves shoulder-to-shoulder with today's government school dependents, demanding from their government money for the services they formerly purchased for themselves.

A hundred years ago most Americans would have thought it incredible that the federal government would one day systematically relieve individuals of their responsibility to save for their retirement, and families of their duty to take care of their elderly parents. Today it is the duty and responsibility that seem incredible.

Right now, 6 million American children have parents who believe education is the province and duty of families. Those families embody the solution; if we use vouchers to convert them to government dependents, they will become part of the problem. Let us not extend the problem but expand the solution.

Notes

1. Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman, Free to Choose (New York: Avon Books, 1981), p. 160.
2. Quoted in "Best of Both Worlds," interview with Milton Friedman, Reason, June 1995, p. 36.
3. Friedman and Friedman, p. 153. On the very next page, however, the Friedmans offer, as a guard against the possibility of fraud, that "voucher[s] would have to be spent in an approved school or teaching establishment" (emphasis in original). More recently, Milton Friedman emphasized the critical importance of the stipulation that "no conditions be attached to the acceptance of vouchers that interfere with the freedom of private enterprisers to experiment, to explore and to innovate." Milton Friedman, "Public Schools: Make Them Private," Washington Post, February 19, 1995.
4. Joy Dee Anthony, "Vouchers in California: Dimmer Prospects for 1996," Report Card, Special California Supplement, September-October 1995, pp. 1-2.
5. "Union Dues," Editorial, Report Card, July-August 1996, p. 5.
6. Irving Kristol, "The Inevitable Outcome of Outcomes," Wall Street Journal, April 18, 1994.
7. Data for 1943 are from a review prepared by the U.S. commissioner of education for the Subcommittee on Education of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, in National Education Improvement Act of 1963, A Review and Analysis of the Proposed Legislation, 88th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1963), p. 46. Data for 1995 are from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 1996 (Washington: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, November 1996), table 309, pp. 320-21.
8. In an August 27, 1996, letter to the editor of the Wall Street Journal, commenting on Cleveland's pilot voucher program, Ronald Trowbridge cited the 1984 Supreme Court decision in Grove City v. Bell: "In purpose and effect BEOGs [federal aid directly to students] represent federal assistance to the College's own financial aid program." Trowbridge goes on to point out that in 1988 Congress "broadened the term 'recipient' from 'program specific' to include the entire school." The Title IX language now reads, "[T]he

term 'program or activity' and 'program' [sic] mean all [emphasis added] of the operation of . . . a college, university, or . . . a local education agency . . . , system of vocational education, or other school system."

9. Charles L. Glenn, Choice in Schools in Six Nations (Washington: U. S. Department of Education, 1989), pp. 210-11. The six nations studied were France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Great Britain, Canada, and (then) West Germany.

10. Ibid., pp. 41-42.

11. Ibid., p. 189.

12. Ibid., p. 115.

13. Estelle James, "The Public-Private Division of Responsibility for Education," in International Encyclopedia of Education, 2d ed. (Oxford: Elsevier Science, 1994), p. 782.

14. Estelle James, "Public Policies toward Private Education: An International Comparison," International Journal of Educational Research 15, no. 5 (1991): 374. Emphasis added.

15. Estelle James, "Private Education and Redistributive Subsidies in Australia," in Privatization and Its Alternatives, ed. W. Gormley (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p. 108.

16. Congressional Record, January 31, 1996, H1031.

17. Gilbert K. Chesterton, Heretics (New York: John Lance, 1909), p. 33.

18. Pius XI, Encyclical letter on the Christian Education of Youth, Divini Illius Magistri, 1929, pp. 60-61.

19. Friedman and Friedman, p. 153.

20. For examinations of the political, social, and economic motivations behind the creation of government schooling, as well as the history of popular literacy and school attendance before government funding and compulsion, see E. G. West, "The Uneasy Case for State Education," Center for Independent Education of Wichita Collegiate School, Wichita, no date; and E. G. West, "The Political Economy of American Public School Legislation," in Education and the State: A Study in Political Economy, 3d ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1994), pp. 295-337.